**Read this article. Add 4 comments as you read. Answer the questions at the end.**

The Associated Press  
For some Detroit services, call the D.I.Y. Dept.  
By COREY WILLIAMS

— May. 9 12:10 PM EDT DETROIT (AP) — Detroit may be broke but it will soon have a first-rate motor pool, featuring 23 new ambulances and a fleet of 100 new police cars. Some city parks also are getting tender loving care. New fruit trees and shrubs have been planted, and mowing crews are beginning to make the rounds to keep the green spaces tidy.

One of the surprising things about Detroit's descent toward insolvency — so dire that a state-appointed emergency manager recently arrived to take over — is that public services haven't collapsed as completely as some might have expected.

But that's not because city departments are functioning as usual. They're not. Instead, a growing collection of volunteers, some affluent, some just average guys riding their Toros, are trying to pick up some services that local government can't provide.

Detroit's Department of D.I.Y. is either the most heartwarming or humiliating reflection of its distress, but the volunteers insist it shows their refusal to give up on the place where they live.

"When the system fails us, you have to become the system," said Mitch Logan, a 48-year-old film producer who is part of a self-dubbed "Mower Gang" that mows neighborhood parks after they've finished their own yards.

In addition to the landscaping, a church group is boarding up vacant houses in the Brightmoor neighborhood, one of the city's most distressed, to keep criminals out. And several neighborhoods are now hiring security to patrol their streets, supplementing an undermanned police department.

As for the new cars, "It is unprecedented for us to help buy emergency vehicles or police cars," said Rip Rapson, chief executive of the Kresge Foundation, which joined with Detroit's automakers and other businesses to make the purchase. However, "this was the kind of expenditure they could not find in their budget."

Detroit's problems have been a national spectacle for the last several years, the result of the region's long economic slump and of past mismanagement that squandered city resources. By the time emergency manager Kevyn Orr took over city finances in March, local government was $327 million in the red and had gone through rounds of layoffs and cuts.

Bus service has been reduced or discontinued on about three dozen routes, leaving thousands of daily riders to find other ways around town. Libraries and recreation centers began closing extra days for employee furloughs and trash trucks were delayed because of breakdowns.

Police manpower now numbers 2,600 officers, down from 4,000 a decade ago.

The city's parks were in danger of becoming a particular eyesore. Until donors stepped in, the city planned to close almost half of them. Still, mowing on many is scheduled only every three weeks.

"It's a disgrace to the nation, a disgrace to the state," said Harriet Cammock, a writer who moved to the suburbs because of the deterioration.

Some area residents have begun adapting, though they couldn't come close to filling the huge need.

Tom Nardone of suburban Birmingham, owner of an Internet novelty business, started the Mower Gang. Through word-of-mouth, his website and Facebook, the group has grown to more than 20 regulars who take care of eight or nine parks where the weeds were too high for children to play. He hopes to keep expanding.

"I understand how the budget works (but) I'm mad at the city," he said during a cleanup trip to Dueweke Park on Detroit's lower east side, where only one of the six swings on the swing set still had a seat.

On the other side of town in Brightmoor, a few members of the Rosedale Park Baptist Church gave up waiting for the city to demolish vacant houses in the neighborhood, where dozens of streets already have more empty lots than families. They bought plywood and boarded up about 20 of houses and began mowing yards.

Now, "they won't become a place where our children can get raped and robbed," said Roy Harlin, who works at the church.

Residents are becoming more active in Palmer Woods, an exclusive neighborhood of gently curving streets lined with grand Tudor homes and mini-mansions.

Rochelle Lento and her neighbors pay more than $300 a year each for private security even though the 12th Police Precinct is nearby. Residents in nearby Sherwood Forest are also hiring security, and a business association on the city's east side now pays off-duty Detroit police officers to do patrols.

"We'll do what we need to do to remain safe and secure," said Lento, a lawyer, whose house was stripped of three copper downspouts by thieves.

A group that she's a part of also has planted trees and painted benches and bleachers at the ballfield in Palmer Park, one of the city's largest public spaces, so it could be used.

Katherine McFate, chief executive of the Washington-based Center for Effective Government, said she understands the need but that Detroit should be wary of letting donors go too far.

"The idea that we are now outfitting first responders through charitable contributions should be very concerning," she said. "There are certain functions that you want government to perform that should not be at the whim of individuals or charities."

But community organizations such as the nonprofit Kresge Foundation — which contributed $1 million toward the emergency vehicles and earlier pledged $150 million to support broader economic and infrastructure improvements — said Detroit's dire condition requires more than traditional efforts.

"No arms were twisted here" to buy the vehicles, said Rapson. "Mayor (Dave) Bing made a really compelling argument to the business community and the foundation community" for the help.

**Questions:**

1. Define: broke, insolvency, affluent, supplement, undermanned, spectacle, discontinued, furlough, patrol

2. What is surprising about Detroit’s financial troubles, according to the reporter? What expectations did people have who found it surprising? Why did they hold these expectations?

3. Do you think voluntary efforts to fill in for government services can work over the long term? Why or why not?

4. Why does Katherine McFate think Detroit should be wary of letting donors go too far? Would government be better able to provide services if volunteers were not providing them? Explain.

5. Why do we ordinarily rely on government rather than voluntary efforts for the services that Detroit’s government is no longer able to provide?

6. What are Detroit citizens voluntarily doing in the wake of the government’s inability to provide many services?

7. Why weren’t they doing these things before the government’s financial crisis?

8. Besides volunteering, what are some ways people could substitute for services government performs if it became unable to do so?

9. What government services would people least be able to do without or find substitutes for?

10. How can we best prepare to do without government services? Do people outside of Detroit need to worry about this? Why or why not?

11. Why is this news?